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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: HALO TRUST'S CLEARANCE ACTIVITIES TO  
CONTINUE

¶1. (SBU) Summary and comment. A \$4 million, USG-funded project being implemented by HALO Trust, a British demining NGO, for training, risk education, surveying and clearance operations in the Gori-Tskhinvali corridor and Abkhazia is back on track after a Georgian regulation threatened to derail it. In December, HALO learned of an administrative requirement of the Ministry of Economic Development that could have led to an immediate cessation of their clearance work. HALO Trust raised its concerns with the relevant ministries. The Ambassador sent a letter to the Minister of Economic Development requesting a modification to the requirement for NGO's engaged in humanitarian work to allow HALO's work to continue unimpeded. In January, HALO informed poloff that they had come to an agreement with the Ministry that permitted HALO to maintain its activities, and credited the Ambassador's letter as essential in reaching this agreement. HALO's activities enhance the safety of the Georgian people, allow for the return of displaced populations, improve citizen confidence in the government and restore livelihoods in these regions, making it vital that HALO's work continue unhindered. End summary and comment.

¶2. (SBU) In December 2008, HALO Trust informed the embassy of a decree issued by the Ministry of Economic Development's Transport Authority, Article 9, paragraph 31, subparagraph C of the rules on transportation, stating that transportation of an especially dangerous substance, which includes explosives and radioactive substances, is permissible only with the escort of the protection police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The decree further stated that the vehicle of transport must have proper painting and be equipped with special devices such as a loudspeaker, projector and special siren. The explosives that HALO Trust uses for the purposes of humanitarian demining and clearance operations were included in the category of dangerous substances covered by this decree.

¶3. (SBU) HALO Trust reported to poloff that no other country that they operate in requires such an escort for the transport of explosives and requested support. According to HALO Trust, the norm for mine action is that operators are accredited to store, transport and use explosives by a National Mine Action Authority (NMAA). However, as of yet, there is no NMAA in Georgia, and the country is not set up administratively to handle humanitarian demining. With HALO clearance teams working at a minimum of five different sites every day and employing mobile survey and clearance teams, hiring escorts from the State Protection Service, if they were even able to provide them, would have been extremely cost prohibitive.

¶4. (SBU) After HALO began discussions with the appropriate ministries, the Ambassador sent a letter to the Minister of Economic Development, per HALO Trust's request, asking for a modification to the decree that exempted small quantities of explosives for the purposes of humanitarian demining. HALO Trust reported to poloff in early January that a member of

its national staff met with officials from the Ministry of Economic Development and reached an agreement allowing HALO Trust to continue its activities, while the Ministry began the process of amending the decree as requested. The Ambassador's letter was cited as essential to the successful resolution of the issue.

TEFFT